



# GĪLĀN IV. HISTORY IN THE EARLY ISLAMIC PERIOD

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The Gelae (Gilites) seem to have entered the region south of the Caspian coast and west of the Amardos River (later Safīdrūd) in the second or first century B.C.E. Pliny identifies them with the Kadusii previously living there. More likely they were a separate people, coming perhaps from the region of Dāgēstān, and superseded the Kadusii. Subsequently they also crossed the Amardos river and, jointly with the Deylamites (q.v.), supplanted the Amardi. Like the Deylamites, they are mentioned as mercenaries of the Sasanian kings but do not seem to have come under their effective rule. The dynasty of the Dabuyids (q.v.) is said to have originated in Gīlān before moving to Ṭabarestān. In 553, Gīlān is mentioned together with Āmol as the seat of a Nestorian bishop.

In early Islamic times the territories of the Gilites extended east of the Safīdrūd (Bīa-pīš) in the coastal lowlands as far as Ḳošam (Arabicized Hawsam, modern Rūdesar). West of the river (Bīa-pas) they occupied the lowlands north of Tārom and were bordered in the west and northwest by Ṭāleš. Gīlān was not occupied by the Arabs. Reports of Gīlān paying tribute to the caliphal government in the early 'Abbasid age most likely refer to western



Gilān; eastern Gilān was effectively protected by the Deylamites occupying the mountains against Muslim penetration. The Gilites are rarely mentioned in early Islamic sources, mostly in association with the Deylamites. Legendary genealogy made their ancestor Gil a brother of Deylam, the ancestor of the Deylamites. Like the Deylamites, they spoke a northwestern Iranian dialect which was largely incomprehensible to other Persian speakers.

Mass conversion to Islam occurred in Gilān in the later 3rd/9th and early 4th/10th century. In western Gilān, Abū Ja‘far Qāsem b. Moḥammad Tūmī Tamīmī, a Ḥanbalī scholar from Āmol, spread Sunnite Islam. He was buried in Rašt, where he was later remembered as Ostād Abū Ja‘far and his tomb was venerated. After the conversion of Gilān to Twelver Shi‘ism, he came to be considered a *sayyed*. In eastern Gilān, the ‘Alid Ḥasan b. ‘Alī Oṭrūš al-Nāṣer le’l-Ḥaqq (d. 304/912), preaching in Hawsam, rallied the people to Zaydī Shi‘ism. His tomb in Āmol was visited by eastern Gilite pilgrims. The schism between Ḥanbalī western Gilān and Zaydī Nāṣerī eastern Gilān lasted for many centuries and acted as a political and cultural divide. From western Gilān came numerous Sunnite traditionists and Ḥanbalī scholars with the *nesba* Gilānī since the 5th/11th century. The eastern Gilites became closely associated with the Zaydī Deylamites and shared in the “Deylamite Expansion” (Minorsky) of the 4th/10th century.

In his account of the Gilites, reflecting the situation around the time of his conversion, Abū Eshāq Šābī states that they were divided into four tribes named by him. As described by him, these “tribes” appear more like clans of a small nobility and were all located in a central region of Gilān around Lāhijān and Rašt. Like the Deylamites, the Gilites recognized a line of kings who normally belonged to the royal clan named Šāhānšāhāvand and dwelled in the region of Dākel, northwest of Lāhijān. Among their kings was Līlī b. Šahdūst (No‘mān) who was killed in battle in 309/921 after conquering Ṭūs. Also of the royal Gilite clan were the Ziarids (q.v.), a dynasty ruling Gorgān and Ṭabarestān from 320/932 to the last quarter of the 5th/11th century.

Even after Islamization and the Deylamite expansion, Gilān and Deylamān remained politically semi-independent and fragmented. Ziarids, Buyids, and later Saljuqs sought to gain influence from the outside and were at times able to exact tribute, but not to impose government or regular taxation. The Zaydīs in eastern Gilān supported ‘Alid rulers seated, in the 4th/10th and 5th/11th centuries, in Hawsam (see [‘ALIDS OF ṬABARESTĀN, DAYLAMĀN, AND GĪLĀN](#)). Most of the country, however, continued to be controlled by clan-based local



chieftains. In the 6th/12th century Lāhījān replaced Hawsam as the seat of the Zaydī 'Alid rulers. Lāhījān (earlier name Līāhej), from where the Deylamite Būyid dynasty had originated, was still considered Deylamite in the 4th/10th century. Now it became the main town of eastern Gilān.

Under the Mongol Ilkhanids Gilān at first remained independent. In 706/1306-7 the Il-khan Oljāytū mounted a major campaign to subjugate Gilān. The Mongols suffered heavy losses, and Oljāytū gained only nominal recognition of his suzerainty. Gilān thus was incorporated into the Il-khanid empire but continued to be ruled by its local dynasties. After 769/1367-68 'Alī Kīā b. Amīr Kīā Malāṭī, an 'Alid leader of Zaydī penitents, gained control of eastern Gilān with backing from the Mar'aṣī *sayyeds* ruling in Māzandarān. He and his descendants established themselves in Lāhījān and ruled all of eastern Gilān until the early Safavid age. In western Gilān the Sunnite Shafi'ite Eshāqvand dynasty rose to power from the middle of the 7th/13th century. Seated in Fūman, the dynasty gradually expanded its sway over all of western Gilān. Both dynasties were removed by the Safavid Shah 'Abbās I in 1000/1592, and Gilān came to be ruled by governors appointed by the central government.

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